

## Fixing This Mess by [nerdsarehot75](#)

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**Summary:**

When you start off not liking each other, how do you become each others saviors?

## Fixing This Mess

Joyce walked down the hallway of her school. Her hair was dripping on her mud-stained shirt and her face was like fire. People scrambled to get out of her way, refusing to be caught in her wrath. She slammed open her locker, the sound reverberating along the hallway. People flinched away.

"Hey Joyce," Karen said, walking up to her, ignoring the death glare she got in return. "What happened this time?"

"What do you think? Fucking Hopper," she growled. She grabbed her books and slammed the door again. Karen didn't so much as flinch.

"What did he do this time?" she asked, falling into step beside Joyce as she stalked down the hall.

"He and his friends tripped me into a puddle, the fucking asshole," she seethed.

"Maybe it was an accident," she said.

"No chance in hell. They were fucking laughing at me as I walked by. No fucking way it wasn't on purpose," she replied.

"Why would he do that, Joyce?" she asked.

"Because he's a dickhead," she snapped, turning to face her friend.

"Does there need to be any more reason than that?"

"Why do you hate him so much?" Karen asked.

"Because he hates me," she replied. They walked to their class, ignoring the slightly wary stares from the other students.

"Hey slut," Hopper said, sidling up to Joyce as she stood smoking under the bleachers.

"Fuck off, Hopper," she said, less bite than normal in her voice.

"Is it true you're knocked up?" he asked, smirking at her.

"No" But she blushed and his smirk grew into a grin. He looked down at her stomach pointedly, raising an eyebrow.

"I can't believe Lonnie would ever touch you. I know he's a scumbag but I'd be worried I'd be covered in dirt if I were him. It wouldn't ever come off," he said, his eyes roving over her face, enjoying the way she bared her teeth at him.

"How about you go back to one of your whores?" she snapped, stubbing out her cigarette.

"You're one to talk. At least they've never been pregnant," he replied, lighting up his own smoke.

"That you know of," She pushed past him.

"What's that mean?" he asked.

"Ask them. You hear some interesting things in the girl's bathroom." She left him behind, watching her walk away. He growled and ground out his cigarette.

Hopper had moved to the city. She was sitting in a cramped home, a bundle of blankets in her arms. The baby inside babbled, his tiny fingers trying to grab her hair. Lonnie was in the other room, drinking from the beer she'd brought him.

Hopper had moved to the city, always the golden boy of the town. And she was the town slut who got knocked up. She was married now, to the idiot she'd let in her pants, and could barely make ends meet. And Hopper was treated as some kind of god, making a good name for them.

She'd heard through the grape vine that he going through police training. As if he were some moral pillar people should look up to. It wasn't like he'd single handedly ruined her life.

She'd been thinking about it. If Hopper hadn't been such a dick to her, other boys may have wanted to go out with her. And then she wouldn't have been stuck with dead end Lonnie because she wouldn't have been starved for affection enough to let him convince her to have sex. She wouldn't have felt like she had something to prove. And then she wouldn't have gotten pregnant. Not that she didn't love her son, because she did, more than anything in her life, but she hadn't planned on having kids so early. She'd always planned on leaving Hawkins and living in a city, somewhere she could truly be anonymous.

Not somewhere everyone knew her business and judged her every choice.

Hopper was back.

Lonnie and her had been fighting. He'd thrown an empty bottle of wine at her and she'd heard it smash on the wall behind her. The boys were holed up in one of their rooms. She could hear Will crying through the wall. She was shouting and couldn't get herself to stop. Until someone began knocking on the door.

She opened it, ready to pretend everything was fine until she saw his face. He was unshaven and unkempt and she felt a thrill of pleasure shiver down her spine at the thought he wasn't as perfect as everyone

thought. She's snarled at him, an actual snarl.

Lonnie had stepped up behind her, his hand resting on her shoulder possessively, and if Hopper hadn't been there she would have slapped it away. But he was so she lent back into the warm body behind her, refusing to admit there was a problem.

"I got a call about a disturbance," he said. Joyce frowned. There wasn't the fight she was used to in his voice. It sounded... empty?

"Must be the wrong house," Lonnie said. Hopper grimaced at him.

"From the shouting I heard from out here I would say you're full of shit," he argued. That was more the teenager Joyce had known.

"We're fine, aren't we babe?" Lonnie squeezed her shoulder.

"Couldn't be better," she replied. She relished in the dark shadow that passed over Hopper's face. Lonnie slammed the door on him and led her back into the living room.

"What's that fucker doing back?" Lonnie growled, slumping down on the sofa.

"I dunno, do I?" she snapped, walking down that hall.

"Where are you going?" he called after her.

"To see our sons, or did you forget they exist?" she yelled back. But all she could think about was Hopper's return.

The next time she saw Hopper she was working. She'd notice him come in but had lost him among the shelves. She was working at the register, forcing smiles and small talk. She didn't notice him enter the queue until he was standing before her and she was scanning a loaf of bread and some milk.

He grimaced at her when she looked up and she sneered in return. She shoved the bread and milk into a bag, grabbing the money from his hand and forcing the bag into his hands.

"What happened, Joyce?" he asked.

"None of your god damn business, Hop," she snarled.

"You weren't meant to still be working this shit hole. It's for teenagers with too much time on their hands, not mothers," he said.

"Well, fuck, Hop. Sorry my life didn't pan out as you wanted it to. Although I suppose I'd be dead if it had," she growled.

"Nah, I'd have made you happy with enough time with your kids," he said before walking away. She blinked at his retreating back before the next customer coughed and she broke out of her trance.

She heard the women whispering behind her. Usually it was about

her and her situation but their tone had changed recently. It wasn't scathing and judgmental but sad and pitying.

"His wife left him," one of the women said.

"Why?" another asked.

"I heard when his daughter got cancer it got hard. And then she died and it all went to hell," a third woman supplied. Joyce felt her stomach drop out of her body. Hopper's daughter had died?

Now it all made sense. Why he was being so nice to her, why he was back, why he looked so haunted. Maybe she'd been too harsh to him. But she hadn't known.

"Clarissa is going to dinner with him tomorrow night," the first woman said.

"Clarissa is a good person. If anyone can help it'll be her," the third woman said.

Joyce laughed. Same old Hop, finding solace in the arms of a woman. She'd be surprised if this one lasted longer than a week. Then the women would have something to really talk about. ♦

Lonnie had fucked off. It was hard to care, not with the way he'd treated her. He'd run off to the city with a girl barely out of high school, leaving her with the two boys. She'd spent the night with both boys sleeping in the bed with her, hugging her boys to her.

Will had cried himself to sleep. Jonathan hadn't talked about it, hadn't said a word all night. She'd made their favourite meal and let them stay up watching tv.

She'd come home at the end of her shift, ready to pick the kids up from school. All of Lonnie's things had been removed, sitting on the kitchen table, was a note, telling her everything. The affair, the other house, her own failure. She'd sat there, reading the words over and over, and she'd cried for her boys. Hop had been right. This wasn't how her life was meant to turn out.

So she held her boys extra tight, gave them extra tv time, didn't nag them about homework. She tried to fill the hole their father had left. She wasn't sure she ever would.

Joyce moaned, her head flung back in ecstasy. Her body was on fire, every nerve ending standing to attention. Her hands were gripping soft hair, her body writhing in pleasure beneath the weight of the larger body. She gripped him harder, her fingernails digging into his skin. She tugged on the hair and he growled.

He nipped at her skin. She was sure she'd have marks tomorrow but by god she'd be leaving some of her own too. She tugged his hair again and he increased the pace.

She could feel the wave building in her, reaching higher and higher. Her hips had lost all rhythm and she was crying out. He pounded into her, groaning into her neck. She could feel the reverberation all through her body.

The wave broke and she was flying. She was so far out of her own body she barely felt him shudder above her. He collapsed next to her, heaving for breath. He was staring up at the ceiling, his arms behind his head. She watched the curtain flutter over the open window, the breeze cooling the sweat from their skin.

"Joyce," he said into the darkness.

"Don't," she said. He drew in another breath. "Don't Hop."

She got up from the bed and scrabbled on the floor for her clothes. She pulled them on, her back to Hop, still laying in the bed. She ran her fingers through her hair, trying to right it. He reached out a hand to her but she moved before he could touch her.

"This won't happen again," she said, and walked out of the room. She didn't look back.

She was lying on the bed, the sheets tangled around her sweaty body. She was still trying to catch her breath, her heart beating faster than a humming bird. Hop had rolled off the bed and gone into the kitchen for something. Now was the time to get up, put her clothes back on, and walk out with as much dignity as she could.

He appeared in the doorway clutching two beers. He handed one to her. She looked at it and took a sip. He sat on the bed, tugging the sheets over his body. She turned away from him. She didn't want this, had never wanted this. She should have left when she had the chance.

"I met your Jonathan today," he said into the silence.

"You stay away from my boys," she snapped. He held up his hands in surrender.

"Calm down, mummy bear, I'm doing shit all. I was just going to say he was very polite," he said.

She huffed and took a swig from the bottle. They settled back into silence. She could feel him looking at her and tried to ignore it. Her skin itched where his eyes landed. She wanted to gouge those eyes out. Instead, she turned away, setting the beer on the floor and got

dressed.

She's tried so hard to leave quickly this time. She really had. But there was a child's drawing pinned up and the bright colours had stopped her in her tracks. The family portrait was the most beautiful thing in the entire house. She hugged her arms around herself and looked at it.

She couldn't move her feet. She could hear her heart beat in her ears. She felt cold.

"Sara was so proud when she gave that to me," Hop said.

He was standing right behind her. She could feel the heat radiating off his body. She turned to face him.

"I'm so sorry, Hop," she said.

He looked down at her, surprise mingling with sadness. She reached out a hand, hesitant in all the space between them. His fingers wrapped around hers and she let out a small sigh.

She didn't know how long they stood like that, together, joined by their hands. All she knew was in that time the universe opened up, the world thrown on its head. It was as if she'd opened her eyes after a long sleep, taken a breath after diving off the deep end.

She kissed his cheek before leaving that night. She could still feel his skin against her lips, the way his beard scratched. Her heart thumped a little harder, a little more noticeable. She hoped her boys hadn't heard her cry during the night.

"Why the store?" he asked her one night.

She'd brought food and a bottle of wine over. When he'd asked she'd said they needed to keep their energy up. He'd laughed at her but accepted the food none the less. They were sitting with their backs pressed against the couch, on the floor.

"It was the only place willing to let me work there. Donald has been very good to me," she said, shrugging. He took a moment to look at her.

"What?" she asked.

"That can't be enough with two growing boys," he said. She felt her hackles rise.

"We get by just fine," she said.

"What about," he tried to say.

"We're fine," she cut him off. He let it drop, letting silence fill the room.

Later, once the meal was eaten and the wine drunk, she kissed him. She tried to push away the emotions building in her chest, the pressure building behind her eyes. He held her close, tenderly, as if worried he'd break her.

For the first time they were slow. It wasn't a race to the end, the fireworks weren't the star of the show. He held her the entire time, pressing kisses into her skin. She clung to him, never wanting to let go.

Joyce was avoiding Hopper. It was common knowledge around town. Everyone assumed they'd had another blow out fight, something far beyond the usual snipping. She would avoid anything near the station, and every time he entered the store she'd duck into the back room and wouldn't emerge until Donald came to get her.

Hopper was going around town, looking like a kicked puppy. He'd try and get her attention, coming to see her every day, waving at her, frequenting where he knew she'd be. She was close to yelling at him to leave her alone. She wanted to hit him.

Every night she went home to her boys, made them dinner and spent the evening with them. They were growing up so fast, she could almost see it happening. She didn't want to miss out on anything.

Ignoring Hop and his incessant need to be a part of her life was the best way to do that. He'd been a nice distraction. He always had been.

She definitely didn't feel her heart clench at the sight of him, or feel her stomach flutter when she thought about him. This was about her boys and doing best by them.

Hop cornered her in the car park after her shift. It had been a long day. Will had a cold and she hadn't been able to take the time off to stay with him. Jonathan had missed school to be there instead. She felt like the worst mother in the world. And there was Hop, leaning on her car, looking every bit like the teenage boy who'd terrorised her in high school.

She'd tried to push past him but he hadn't let her open the door. She considered pushing him. She considered turning around and walking home. She considered kissing him.

"What the hell do you want, Hop?" she'd asked, venom lacing her voice.

"To know why you've been avoiding me," he said.



"Fuck you Hop. Not everything is about you," she said, yanking on the door. He didn't budge.

"The whole town knows," he said.

"It's not up to me what those busy bodies gossip about. Who's to say any of it's true?" she snapped.

"I do," he said.

She looked at him, full in the face, for the first time. He looked... betrayed. He put out a hand to her, hovering over her shoulder, as if touching her was something he had to concentrate on. They both looked at it.

She took a step backwards before he could make contact. He sighed and shrugged off the car. She watched him walk away, her gut twisting itself into knots. She ignored it and got in the car, driving home to take care of her sick kid.

Then Will disappeared. Her whole world had begun to fall apart and once again she became the two crazy. No one had believed her. Except Hop. And she'd clung to him, forcing them to stumble down the road to finding her son, her little boy. He'd gone with her into that Upside Down, given her boy his oxygen. He'd saved him. And suddenly avoiding him seemed like the silliest thing in the world. Because he'd been there. Because he'd helped. Because she owed her heart to him.

Once Will was home from the hospital she'd begun going to work again, taking up her old shifts. She was working extra time to pay the medical bills. Jonathan had gotten a job to help her and Will seemed back to normal. Her life was as perfect as she could hope.

Hop would sometimes visit her in the shop, to check up on Will, to hear her talk, to check on her. Until the day he walked into the store, purpose in every step, grabbed her hand and kissed her in the middle of the breakfast cereal aisle.

She opened her mouth to shout at him, say something, an arm raised to hit him in the chest.

"Joyce, for once, just shut up," he said and kissed her again. She rested her hand on his chest and let him.

"I love you," he whispered when they broke apart. She kissed him again and hoped he understood. The tightening of his grip suggested he did.

For the first time she was the subject of gossip for something she was

happy about. She couldn't find it in herself to want them to stop. Because she had her boys, and Hop, and maybe this was exactly how her life was meant to turn out.